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IRON IN DECORATION.

THE special capacity of iron for artistic decoration has of late been turned to fuller account by architects. Elements of progress have been contributed by improvements effected in the sharpness of castings and the increase of modes of varying surface, as applied more particularly to house hardware fittings and various articles of utility.

In constructive forms ornament in iron should be so arranged as to enhance the symmetry of form and contribute to strength. The key to all artistic design in this as in other metals is the centralization and accentuation of some single feature to which other ornamental parts are subordinated. Amazing fertility of resource was displayed by the medieval workers in canopies, gates, screens, railings, lamps, and their foliage girt supports, all in wrought work, and so giving full expression to the conceptions of the artists; also in locks, hinges, keys, etc. Good artistic treatment of iron demands a certain boldness of form, a happy combination of curvilinear and rectangular forms.

Ornateness has become the prime characteristic of interior hardware fittings, articles in this line no longer repelling the sight by their unharmonious contrasts to neighboring surfaces, but displaying tasteful relief designs, silver, nickled, bronzed, or with burnished steel in raised work contrasting with the dead iron surface. Apart from any beauty in molded and open-cut forms, there is always a certain attractiveness in varieties of surfaces of metal that have been brought about by a diversity of means.

Very considerable attention is now paid to relief work, in the subdued style suitable to iron, on the backs and sides of open fire-grates. The diagonal lines of deeper work are varied by central figures sharply cast, or both are superseded by larger fanciful or mythologic figures in relief on the plain panels.

Iron fenders with open work showing conventionalized figures cut in the sheet, their dead shades set off by fire-grate bars of polished steel and brass mountings, are quite in keeping with handsome surroundings. Fire dogs in elaborate style shows excellent work of the quaint medieval order.

However intricate the flowing outlines of ornamental open iron work, provided the contours are easily traceable, the parts well balanced, and the ornament falling in with the constructive form and not appearing as a mere attachment, the impression will be pleasing. In true smith's work, the joints, instead of being united by brazing, for which fused copper and tin are used, are welded at a white heat, the heavier bar scroll work being screwed and riveted previously to being mounted. Such work is illustrated in entrance gates to several of our business city buildings, and which constitute fine examples of decorative treatment.

Where the upper enrichment of such gates would bear heavily down on the centre of the gate, this is separately constructed, and supported by an iron lintel, the horizontal line of which is itself ornamental as emphasizing the curvilinear forms, and contrasting with vertical lines, thus adding also to apparent breadth. The massive *porte cochères* of the courts of French city mansions and chateaux are thus treated, the tapering and swelling branches, graceful flanges and rich interlacements being not infrequently glazed with plate glass.

Color is decidedly wanting in much of our artistic iron work, as in medallions showing relief work, bosses and other ornaments; pillars are improved in effect by colored lines carried down the edges of the flutings, and leaf, foliage and scroll work in capitals can only be properly displayed by being picked out in gold and colors. The beauty of iron balconies is in great part lost to view through painting them in one color, either the same as that prevailing in the façade of a building, or some strongly contrasting and usually sombre hue, indicating that they are mere attachments. Verandas would look vastly better were the life of varied color more frequently imparted to them.

Enamel colors are particularly serviceable in emphasizing salient points, and to this are to be added gilding and coating with bronze. Abundant illustrations of good surface treatment in artistic iron work occur in the rails and balusters and railings of the large wells of some of our business buildings, which with gilding, and as seen under a direct light from

above, have their characteristics well displayed. This country is not without some choice specimens of artistic iron work, dating from colonial times, and wrought at the forge. As illustrative of the adaptability of design to material we have furnished in our paper views some time since of excellent quaint work on New Orleans buildings, in balconies, window screens and gates that date from the French occupation of Louisiana. In these the simplicity of the means by which admirable effects are brought out are very apparent; one may particularly note the boldness and ease of the serpentine curves and the symmetry of the parts.

The fanciful figures of griffins, gorgons, dragons, etc., in which the artists of old revelled, are singularly well fitted for iron ornamentation, and commend themselves to modern adoption.

In olden times heraldic figures, fanciful and mythological, supplied exceeding appropriate subjects for lamp supports, gate hanging, cranes or mountings on posterns, and although many of the ancient emblems have lost much of their original significance, they still constitute a suggestive repertoire of forms. The winged dragon supporting a lamp, which projects from the corner of the Field building, is a fine instance of execution on the spirit of old medieval treatment.

For such iron work as is displayed on the exterior of many of our buildings, as in verandas, balconies, gates and railings, much is of a really elegant character; no black surface offers a rest to the eyes which follow at leisure the convolutions.

The newly discovered process of coating iron with aluminum provides an additional resource to ornamentalists in this metal. Living emphatically in an "iron age," we are destined to witness more and more the application of iron in a decorative form.

Several new and imposing edifices erected within the past few years have certain architectural features emphasized by attachments to the walls of fancifully shaped convolutions of iron bands, with sundry projecting spikes and flower-bearing stems placed at the angles of façades where these join the cornice or beneath the strong lines of the several stories.

